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Rising sheer from the sea, Anacapa's eastern point is topped by a lighthouse

THE EVER CHANGING ISLAND

Anacapa thrusts a rocky finger from the sea off the coast of California

by MERRILL C. ALLYN

OF THE EIGHT islands lying off the coast of Southern California, seven bear the names that were given them by the early Spanish explorers. The eighth, Anacapa, retains the Indian name by which it was probably known for centuries before the first Europeans reached the Pacific Coast. Anacapa, interpreted by explorer George Vancouver as meaning "deceptive" or "ever-changing," fits the nature of the island. No other word or phrase could describe it half so well.

Seen from the Southern California mainland, Anacapa seems to be quite a bit of land. The easterly two thirds of the island appear to be a long, low table-land and the westerly third a high rounded hill. Not infrequently the image seen from the mainland will be heightened or otherwise distorted by mirages. In one form of the mirage a ghostly image of the island floats in the sky above it, creating a weird double-decked effect.

When approached by boat from east or west, Anacapa appears quite small and unimpressive. It becomes apparent that, although nearly five miles long in an east and west direction, the island is comparatively narrow. It has so little substance that one is bound to be reminded of a huge billboard, or of a movie set that faces the mainland.

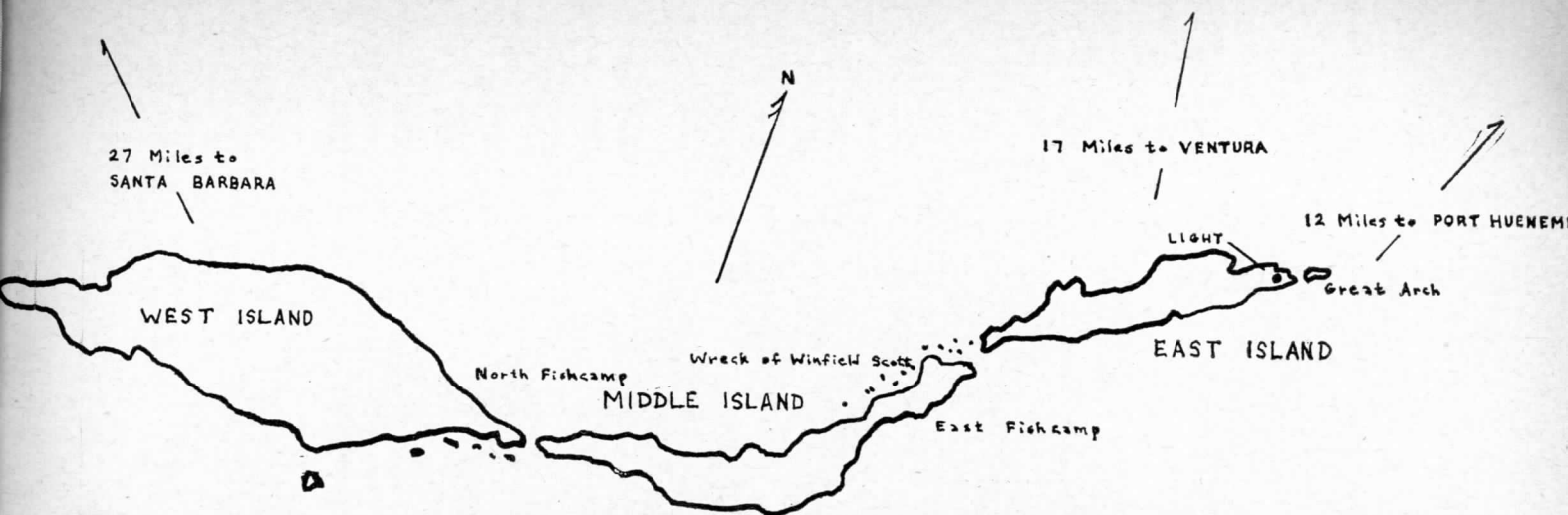
The island is the fantastically eroded skeleton of a mountain

range that rises out of comparatively deep water. Centuries of unceasing work by wind and sea have sculptured the rocky cliffs of its coastline into grotesque shapes, caves, and natural arches. The largest arch, a beautiful landmark known to all who have cruised the waters of the Santa Barbara Channel, is located at the extreme east end of the island.

In two places the action of the sea has cut through the island to form water gaps, which separate the sections at high tide, making Anacapa into three little islands—the Anacapas. In some other places the islands are so narrow that one might stand at the top of a narrow ridge of land and throw rocks into the surf on either side. In these places more water gaps and new islands are in the making.

The East island, which is little more than a quarter mile wide by a mile or so long, is under the jurisdiction of the U. S. Coast Guard. Here, on a tilted mesa about two hundred and fifty feet above the sea, the Coast Guard maintains a lighthouse, fog signal, radio beacon, and a neat little community of keepers' houses.

Landing on the lighthouse island can only be made in good weather. The utility boat, attached to the light station, makes use of an indentation in the precipitous north side. There it is picked up by a hoist and set on a shelf carved out of the side of a cliff. A steep metal stairway runs from the boat-landing to the top of the cliff. From there a road runs to the



Eroded through the centuries by wind and waves, Anacapa has, in effect, become three islands that are separated at

high tide. Landings on the east island, on which the light-house is located, can be made only when the weather is fine.

light and the keepers' houses. For many years there was only one vehicle on the island to use this road. This, a pickup truck, ran up the amazing mileage of four hundred and fifty miles in a period of ten years.

The Middle and West islands, also government-owned, used to be leased out for grazing. Sheep were kept on them for many years. There were also several abalone and lobster camps established in those places where it was found practical to land and haul out skiffs. In 1938, Presidential action was taken to designate Middle and West Anacapa as the Channel Islands National Monument. They were then placed under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service.

The Anacapas rise out of deep water and, with the exception of a couple of rocks close to the easterly water-gap, are pretty free of outlying dangers. In fine weather one can cruise quite close to the foot of the cliffs and combine a tour of the island's beautiful marine gardens with an inspection of nature's sculpture. The sea will be heard slushing and gurgling as it washes through a honeycomb of caverns beneath the island. In some places, air compressed in sea-caves forces spray through openings in the rocks and sends it flying high into the air.

Several caves may be entered safely with a dinghy. In one of them there is a spring or, more properly, a seep of fresh water. This is the only known water supply on the Anacapas.

Much of the sea bottom encircling the islands is rocky, a circumstance of considerable interest to anglers. The kelp beds

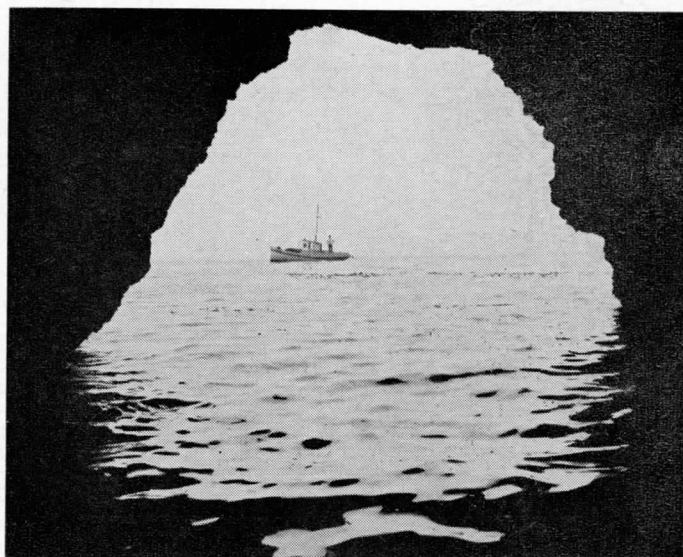
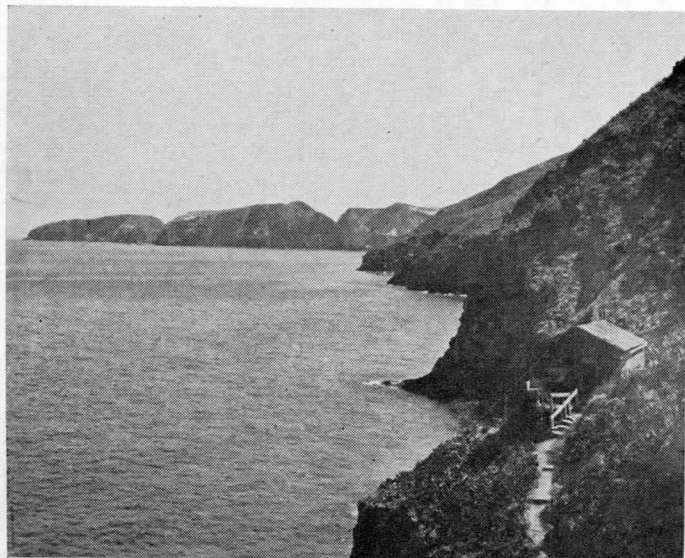
close to shore are the home of bass, sheepshead, whitefish, and sculpin. Many varieties of rock-fish are to be found in deeper water. The Anacapas are also known as one of the best places to go to fish for giant black sea-bass or jewfish. A number of these big fish are caught there every year. Skin divers who visit the islands find them a good place to catch spiny lobster and abalone.

Whether one goes to the Anacapas for fishing or for the purpose of exploration, the visit, generally speaking, should be planned for morning hours during the summer season. Though summer weather may not always seem the best, it is really the safest because it follows a pretty definite pattern. It may be expected that the mornings will be calm and possibly foggy. Around noon a brisk west or north-west breeze will start blowing in the Santa Barbara Channel and the waters around the Anacapas will become uncomfortably choppy. There are no really good anchorages around the Anacapas. Any pleasure boat seeking an overnight anchorage will find more comfort and safety in one of the better protected coves of Santa Cruz Island, which lies just a few miles to the westward.

During the fall and winter seasons there are often long periods of calm; but when bad weather does come it can be pretty rugged, and the direction of the wind can change very quickly. Commercial fishermen working there anchor in the lee, prepared to move at a moment's notice if the wind shifts.

(Continued on page 62)

North side of Anacapa (left) looking east from fish camp. View from cave entrance (right).



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And lastly, make sure your insurance isn't about to lapse. Your broker will probably remind you, but you may have moved to distant waters since last spring.

END

Ever Changing Island

From page 25

They sometimes follow a lee clear around the islands and back to the starting point in the matter of only a few hours.

One should not attempt skiff landings anywhere on the south side of the Anacapas unless thoroughly acquainted with local conditions. Ground swells, which run in from the south, sometimes break heavily against the island. Strangers may safely land at the North Fish Camp, on the north side at the juncture of the West and Middle islands. The camp is marked by a group of four weathered shacks.

Though I have made several hundred fishing trips to the Channel Islands, the word Anacapa always brings to mind the experience of spending a "depression" lobster season (September to March) skiff fishing from the North Fish camp.

During that winter season the waters around the island sometimes lay plate flat for as much as a week at a time.

During the spells of calm we would move some of our traps right in against the foot of the cliffs and tending them would be an enjoyable task. Rowing from one trap to another, we could peer in every cave and crevice and examine bits of wreckage that the sea had deposited in ordinarily inaccessible places.

A well-remembered feature of that season was the recurring northeast wind from the California desert that swept over the Coast Range, picked up speed crossing the Santa Barbara Channel, and fairly lashed the North side of the Anacapas. The most dangerous thing about these storms was their suddenness. The first gust would carry the full force of the storm. The skipper of a survey boat told me that a northeaster he had ridden out in the lee of the island the winter before had been clocked at 90 miles per hour.

Although the wind never blew anywhere near that hard during the winter I lived at the Fish Camp, we experienced northeast storms that were violent enough to make us realize that it would have been suicide to have been out in a small boat when one of them hit. Winds from other directions came up more slowly and you had a chance to row home. When the northeaster came you just had to be on shore—or else! Fortunately, the northeast storms are predictable. They are preceded by a high glass and weather so clear that distant objects would seem close at hand. For some reason most of them hit the Anacapas between 10 and 12 p.m.—though there are exceptions.

We had one of these blows, which started in mid-afternoon. We spotted a line of whitecaps advancing from the direction of the mainland and watched them bear down on the islands with amazing speed. Wind and rough water arrived at almost the same instant.

When the first gust hit, one of our group of fishermen was taking a nap in the most exposed shack of the camp. When he awoke, the flimsy building was rocking in the wind and, no doubt recalling stories of contractor's sheds and tent houses

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being blown away when the lighthouse was being built, he tried to get out of the building. The door, which opened outside, was either jammed or held shut by the force of the wind. Failing to get out here, he climbed out of a window on the lee side and, shielding his face from blowing pebbles, he came scuttling down the hillside to another cabin where the rest of us had taken shelter.

There was a beach in front of the camp with room on it for our three skiffs, extra lobster traps, and other spare gear. We were sure that all of our equipment was well above the reach of the tide. The first storm that came at night pushed the sea over our beach, and our skiffs and traps were soon washing about, banging against each other and against us as we struggled to save them.

The beach washed away that night and took some of our gear with it, but we managed to save the skiffs by pulling them onto the rocky incline that led up to the shacks. Having done all we could to save our property, we returned to the tightest of the cabins and the luxury of a stove and coffee pot. There we spent the rest of the night playing cards and drinking coffee while outside the spray-laden wind rattled the windows and plucked at the eaves.

On days when rough water kept us ashore, some combination of restlessness and curiosity would impel us to explore the more accessible parts of the islands.

We were always on the lookout for places where rain or wind had removed the earth, exposing deposits of shell left by the island Indians. Search these places as we would, we never succeeded in finding any large artifacts. The best find anyone made that winter was a few beads and an abalone shell fish-hook.

Hiking over the middle island, we noticed enough kitchen midden material to convince us that there had once been an Indian village located there, although possibly a long time ago. That brought up the question as to where the Indians had obtained their water. That available in the water cave of the

west island would not have been sufficient, and seemingly was too far away.

We thought it quite possible that the island was larger when the Indians were there and that it had a good spring on it. The spring could have been on a part of the island that was later washed away, or it could have been covered by a rock slide.

A place on the middle island that we sometimes visited was the top of the cliff overlooking the spot where the steamer *Winfield Scott* ran aground in 1852. The *Winfield Scott*, a sidewheeler loaded with an almost unbelievable number of miners returning home from the California Gold Rush, hit the island at full speed during a blinding fog.

The years had removed all visible traces of the wreck, yet we could imagine the ship looming up out of the fog and striking before an order could be given to the helmsman. There would have been shouting and confusion, and the lonely frog-shrouded island must have come suddenly to life as the hundreds of passengers were brought ashore.

Gold might still remain

The *Winfield Scott* carried well over a million dollars worth of gold. Accounts we had read stated that it was all recovered, but looking down upon the spot where we knew that the wreck lay on the bottom, we found it easy to believe that some portion of the *Winfield Scott's* gold stayed with her yet.

Another interesting spot was the place we called the "houses". It was the location of the late Captain H. Bay Webster's headquarters when he kept sheep on the island. All that was left of the houses was a timber that had served as part of a bait-hoisting rig, the outline of a foundation, and a dry cistern.

Back of Webster's old camp was a grove of ancient stunted eucalyptus trees. Captain Bay, whose personal knowledge of the Anacapas covered a period of nearly fifty years, had told us that the gnarled old trees were planted long before his time by a Frenchman who once tried to homestead the middle island.

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He said that they had shown no appreciable growth in all the years he had been going to the islands.

We knew of another clump of trees in a little canyon high on the north side of the west island's 930 foot peak. These trees, which we could plainly see when coasting along the north side of the island, were scrub oaks of a variety not believed common to the other Channel Islands. As they could only be reached from Fish Camp Cove by climbing over some very dangerous loose rock we never attempted a closer inspection of them.

The Anacapas have the same sort of shrubs and grasses that are found on the mainland. There are clumps of the prickly pear, the "tunas" of the Indians, and many plants of the "choya" cactus with round leaves that break off and stick to anything that touches them. One plant not ordinarily seen on the mainland is the fleshy stemmed sea dahlia with yellow daisylike flowers.

Bird life is plentiful on the Anacapas. Among the varieties to be seen are pelicans, gulls, cormorants, oyster-catchers, terns, shore-birds, sea-ducks, eagles, hawks, and several species of song birds. Several kinds of sea birds nest on the Anacapas.

The only animals on the middle and west Anacapas are field mice, rats that owe their presence on the islands to the wreck of the *Winfield Scott*, and some very wild house cats, the descendants of fishermen's pets. Rabbits, turned loose on the lighthouse island, multiplied so rapidly that they soon became a pest. It is said to have been a real problem keeping them in check. The only sort of reptile known to live on the Anacapas is a very tiny harmless lizard.

Sea lion rookery

Anyone passing close to the islands by day or night is apt to hear the barking and roaring of the inhabitants of several well populated sea lion rookeries. The sea lions are frequently encountered when you are exploring the islands caves. As you row cautiously into the semi-darkness of one of the island's grottos you are likely to hear a sea lion's voice and a splash. Then if you watch the eerily-lighted green water beneath your dinghy you will see the animal swimming gracefully toward the cave's entrance.

Sea-otter were once plentiful in the waters around the Anacapas and sea elephants used to haul out on some of the islands' more secluded beaches. The sea elephants, which float high out of water when resting and seem to sink down vertically when alarmed by approaching boats, are not infrequently sighted near the islands, but seem to have entirely given up landing on Anacapa beaches.

For years it was thought that the sea otter were extinct. Now it is known that a few survived and that they are making a remarkable come-back along another part of the California coast. It is possible that these interesting animals may return to the Santa Barbara Channel Islands.

In the past, comparatively few pleasure boat owners have shown an interest in the Anacapas. Published accounts, which put emphasis on the words "bleak", "arid", and "inaccessible" have influenced yachtsmen from Newport and Los Angeles Harbor to by-pass the Anacapas when making summer cruises to the islands farther west.

Recently outboarding enthusiasts have "discovered" the Anacapas. The east end of the lighthouse island, closest point to the mainland, is less than thirteen miles from Port Hueneme where launching facilities are available. Owners of outboard rigs apparently consider this short distance just a skip and a jump for their speedy outfits and in the past couple of years more and more of them have taken to going to the Anacapas for fishing or exploration.

It cannot be said that all fishermen and yachtsmen familiar with the area are favorable to these visits by outboard. While all are pleased by this evidence of increased public interest in the islands, some have expressed grave concern for the safety of the inexperienced, who almost daily strike off alone in small, open boats. They feel that the extremely short distance, which

makes the trip appear so easy, is more than offset by the sudden weather changes known to occur in the Santa Barbara Channel and around the islands, and the difficulty connected with landing on Anacapa in rough weather.

Some of this apprehension should have been dispelled by a recent news report. It was stated that a lease agreement has been made, permitting a concession to be established on the Anacapas. Location of small boat facilities and weather-wise attendants in the North Fish Camp area would contribute greatly to the safety of first-time, small-boat visitors.

END

Centerboards

From page 30

and makes the bottom like a clapboard house. I have seen several cases where the owner has been over-ambitious and filled and even caulked these dried-back seams. Natural swelling will take care of these opened seams.

In one case of overfilling the swelling was so great that the slot in the centerboard trunk was reduced to the point where the board would not travel. If, when your boat is launched in the spring, she leaks between bed logs and keel, do not try to push cotton or any other type of caulking between them. This has been done with sad results. Let your boat swell several days and if the leak persists, add a few through bolts.

Another fault I would like to mention is setting the rigging so taut that the keel is actually forced away from the hull. This is a common ailment and causes leaks along garboards, in stem stopwaters, and again around centerboard trunks. Your rigging, if reasonably taut, will protect spars. It need not be bar taut. This actually happened in three different cases in our yard last year.

Finally, might I add that your centerboard, if properly cared for, will give you years of good service. And if properly maintained, will add greatly to your boat's handling and speed.

END

Flounders

From page 32

water outfits and deep sea rigs. Have everything from split shot to 12 oz sinkers, bucktails to cod hooks, insect repellent and a flash light for night fishing. Your gear will probably include knives for chopping bait, disgorgers, a pocket compass stolen from your son's Boy Scout kit, a lot of rusty old flounder and blackfish hooks, and several leaders for the fly rod.

You use none of this, of course, because you buy new spreaders, flounder hooks, and sinkers at the counter when you pick up two dozen sand worms per man, knowing a dozen is more than enough, and you need none of the claptrap in the tackle box. What with a couple of bushel baskets to carry the fish, an extra can of fuel for safety, heavy clothes in case it turns cold, a dip net because you may catch a cod, you hope (but of course you never will), and there is barely enough room for the three of you.

While trying to get the old whangdoodle started at the float, you ask the boatman where is flounder fishing. He replies, "Everywhere, but when you clear the breakwater turn east and there's an island with a light on it, then bear toward the shore and you will see a rock and a lot of boats will be fishing on the flats. They murdered 'em there last week, but the storm we had on Thursday stirred up the bottom and if you don't hit 'em on the flats try drifting at low tide in the channel." Always, there has just been a storm that spoiled the fishing, according to boat renters.

His advice sounds reasonable, so when you get to the breakwater you bear west instead of east and try drifting in the outside channel in deep water instead of on the flats. The guy on the float gave you a bum steer to keep you from fishing out all the flounders. He knew, of course, that you would go do the opposite to his directive. That is his part of the collusion, but wait and see what the flounder does. Out in the channel you can't get the outboard started and the boy, Billy, in the bow is tired of heaving up the anchor after doing it once. You drift in over a clam bed and a clammer tells you



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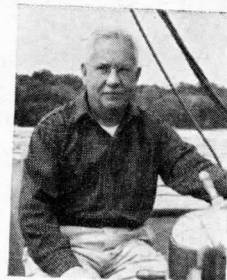
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